CORPORATE CULTURE

Diversity in the workplace

Corporate 'culture' at stake, firms say

By **Joanna Schmidt**
Gazette Telegraph

For some El Paso County employers, Amendment 2's fallout is more than boycotts and lost conventions.

The real threat, they say, is to their corporate culture, that esoteric notion that puts a human face on corporations.

In the past two weeks, a parade of El Paso County employers has spoken out in favor of a "clarification" proposal by local attorney Greg Walta that would prohibit discrimination against homosexuals while denying them special rights.

For some employers, the issue is one of simple morality. They believe Amendment 2 sanctions discrimination against homosexuals, and they believe that's wrong. Although they typically steer clear of political battles, these employers feel compelled to speak out on this issue.

"I want people to know we don't believe in discrimination," said Buck Blessing, cofounder of the 50-employee property management firm Griffis/Blessing Inc. "The issue for me is that what we've done with Amendment 2 is not morally right."

That stand is familiar to such employee-friendly companies as Apple Computer Inc. and Digital Equipment Corp., which support the clarification proposal. But Amendment 2 conflicts with some smaller company's visions of diversity and tolerance, Blessing said.

These employers and others who oppose Amendment 2 say the amendment threatens their ability to recruit and retain new talent, which can hurt their ability to compete. They fear they may be at a disadvantage at a time when the global competition demands more from them.

Many businesses see Walta's proposal — now being pushed by a coalition called Come Together Colorado — as a way to placate the majority of Coloradans and get on with business.

"We must provide an environment in which employees feel valued, safe and heard," said Rochelle King-Patton, whose Digital Equipment card reads "Human Resources Valuing Differences Manager." "If we are located in a community that doesn't provide the same things, we've got a problem."

Environment. Values. Culture. All have narrow meanings when they refer to a company's day-to-day operations, hiring practices and the feel of the workplace. Many employers say diversity, tolerance and teamwork are crucial to success and key parts of their cultures.

Every company has a culture, whether by design or default. It's a notion as personal as a personality.

The cultures of some companies, like Apple Computer and Hewlett-Packard Co., are the legacy of their founders. Those businessmen instilled their moral and social convictions in their companies. Their vision and values have been embraced by future generations of executives and employees.

Apple, founded by two men obsessed with creating a computer for the masses, rewards initiative, creativity and individual contributions, said Debbie Rau, human resources manager for Apple's worldwide operations, in Cupertino, Calif. "We believe it's important to create an environment where people can excel."

At its new manufacturing plant in Fountain, Apple's culture stresses hard work, teamwork, cost consciousness — and fun, said Jim Bilodeau, site director.

Hewlett-Packard employees tout "The HP Way." Since Dave Packard and Bill Hewlett set up shop in Packard's garage in Palo Alto, Calif., in 1939, the company has stressed individual dignity and respect, said Candyce Wehrkamp, regional human resources manager in Colorado Springs and a 15-year Hewlett-Packard employee.

The HP Way assumes em-

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John Terhune/Gazette Telegraph

Buck Blessing, co-owner of the property-management firm Griffis-Blessing Inc., is one of many Colorado Springs business people who are concerned about Amendment 2. Many employers value, even insist on, diversity in the workplace.

WORKPLACE

Employers to make profound changes

Family Leave Act just the beginning

By **Barbara Woller**
Gannett News Service

When President Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act early this month, it marked the start of some profound changes his administration is expected to bring to the workplace.

Be it an office, factory, classroom or store, representatives of labor and business say the workplace will be in the limelight the next four years.

For example, the Family Leave Act, twice vetoed by former President Bush, will permit workers at companies with at least 50 employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year — with health benefits — for family illness or to care for a child.

ANALYSIS

Other workplace issues, however, are expected to quickly drive the family leave issue from the headlines. The issues range from workplace safety and health care reforms to debate over lifting the cap on damages in discrimination cases, including sexual harassment.

Also on the table is the question of how much of a role business should take in training and educating its workers to keep the United States globally competitive.

Labor unions are expected to have a far stronger impact under a Clinton administration than during the past 12 years of Republican, pro-business rule.

Clinton reportedly is considering ending former President Reagan's 1981 ban that prevented fired members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization from returning to their jobs.

Reagan issued the ban after the controllers struck in violation of federal law, and the PATCO strike became symbolic of organized labor's frustration with the Reagan and Bush administrations.

No one can say how these anticipated changes will play out.

"But there's no question that we're going to see an enormous change in the way government reacts to unions and basically intercedes in the workplace," said Patrick L. Vaccaro, managing partner of the White Plains, N.Y., office of Jackson, Lewis, Schnitzler & Krupman, a nationwide law firm that represents management exclusively.

The Family Leave Act, which takes effect in six months, is seen by many to be a bellwether of reforms to come as well as the controversy that will surround them.

Proponents argue it will boost employee morale and decrease absenteeism because workers will not have to choose between their families or their jobs. Corporations will benefit, they say, because they will not have to go to the expense of hiring and training new workers.

Business groups, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, did not oppose the idea of family leave but strongly fought the idea that government should mandate such change.

"Companies that don't (have family leave) don't do

See **WORKPLACE**/E4

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have made diversity more than a policy statement.

From hiring practices to diversity awareness workshops, they are working to make their work forces reflect America's diversity. And they're creating an environment in which all employees feel welcome, respected and encouraged to excel, officials say.

U S West Inc., Apple Computer Inc., Digital Equipment Corp., MCI Communications Corp. and countless other companies are explicit in their commitment to building a diverse work force through hiring.

All include the standard equal opportunity classes — age, gender, ethnic origin and physi-

cause . . . an environment which embraces difference is critical to each employee's ability to succeed and to the success of the corporation," said Kenneth Olsen, Digital co-founder and former president, in the company's January 1992 equal opportunity/affirmative action statement.

Beyond hiring practices, many employers sanction groups of Hispanics, blacks, disabled people, Asians, gays and lesbians, women, veterans and others. The groups offer a support network to employees and sponsor workshops and programs to promote "awareness" of their constituency, employers say.

The goal is not to force employees to embrace each others' differences. Instead, they hope to

understanding becomes critical, employers say.

U S West Inc.'s first "resource groups," for example, were created in the late 1970s for women, Hispanics and blacks, said Tom Bouchard, senior vice president and human resources officer.

The company since has added five other groups. The largest — Somos, which means "we" in Spanish — offers programs on Hispanic culture to U S West employees. The group also mentors young Hispanic school children and offers scholarships to all youths at risk of dropping out of school.

In the past three to five years, many companies have added such support groups for gay and lesbian employees.

John Sculley, Apple chairman and chief executive officer, and Michael Spindler, president and chief operating officer, set the tone from the top, said Debbie Rau, human resources manager for Apple's worldwide operations.

They visit employee groups, speak at diversity-related programs in the industry and sponsor diversity conferences within Apple.

"The best and biggest companies, from Xerox to Johnson and Johnson, have really been role models for women, for people of color in terms of the diversity issue," said Tom Peters, management consultant and co-author of "In Search of Excellence," in an interview last week. "Corporations have been leading the way for a long time."

Culture/Diversity brings competitive advantage

From E1

ployees want to do a good job, and will if provided a good working environment. The company trusts employees to do their jobs without constant directives, and encourages teamwork. The strength of those teams is dependent on the diversity of ideas offered by diverse voices, company officials say.

"Coupled closely with this is the HP tradition of treating each individual with consideration and respect and recognizing personal achievements," Hewlett says in company literature. "This sounds almost trite, but Dave and I honestly believe in this philosophy and have tried to operate the company along these lines since it first started."

Similarly, Digital Equipment co-founder Kenneth Olsen created a workplace in which people are respected, said King-Patton, the human resources manager in Colorado Springs.

Digital employees are instructed to do what is "right" when dealing with a customer, supplier or employer — it's codified as Digital's "First Rule." Employees who know they can make a difference feel ownership in the company. The result: better products and services, King-Patton said.

U S West's values are the legacy of Jack MacAllister, managers say.

MacAllister joined the Bell System in 1950 and oversaw the creation of U S West after the 1984 divestiture of AT&T. He was designated U S West chief executive officer in 1982 and retired in December 1990.

Among his biggest contributions was his commitment to diversity — reflected today in the company's work force and in accolades from publications and business groups. MacAllister wanted to make the company "a place in which everyone has the opportunity to grow, to contribute and to serve," according to the company's document on pluralism.

The reason diversity is so important?

"It is the right thing to do," said Tom Peters, management guru and co-author of the 1982 bestseller "In Search of Excellence," in an interview last week. "Plus, it works."

Said Tom Bouchard, U S West's human relations officer: "We think diversity is a competitive advantage. We think it's important that our work force is a mirror image of our markets." For U S West, like many large employers, that diversity includes sexual orientation.

In the global marketplace, companies encounter customers who look and act differently than they do. How better to develop products for them than to have employees who can relate to an increasingly diverse pool of customers, they say.

A more diverse work force yields more new ideas — for products, services, manufacturing techniques, business strategies. It also yields a greater variety of ideas and new perspectives, employees say.

When Apple asked older consumers why they weren't buying Apple computers, the consumers said it was hard to read the monitors. Older consumers, many with bifocal glasses, couldn't tilt the screen to use it, said Rau, the human resources manager. Because Apple's work force is young, engineers hadn't considered making screens that tilt, she said.

"If you don't tap into every resource at your disposal as a company you've lost an advantage," Rau said. "What differentiates us is our people. We're in the knowledge business and our people are our asset."

The need to embrace diversity also is driven by changing demographics. According to the Hudson Institute's landmark 1987 report "Work Force 2000," only 15 percent of new entrants to the labor force during the next 13 years will be white males. Women and people of color already compose 65 percent of the work force.

"It boils down to this: We need to be able to get employees to work together effectively to meet the demands of the worldwide marketplace," said Ron Glover, Digital employee-relations and diversity manager at the company's Maynard, Mass., headquarters.

Employers want to create a work environment in which all employees feel safe and respected, encouraged to take risks and float new ideas, Peters said.

"It sounds so damn obvious that if you care about your employees, if you exhibit respect for employees, if you give them an opportunity to grow, they're going to make better-quality products," Peters said.

Peters agrees with local employers who believe Amendment 2 contradicts the very essence of corporate diversity and tolerance. The amendment bans protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation. A Denver judge last month issued an order blocking enactment of Amendment 2 until a court challenge can be heard.

"Being a global manufacturer, you need to be able to tap into the very best people," said Bilodeau, the Apple site director in Fountain. "If you've got a perception that this is an area that is not open or tolerant to a certain portion of the community, that's a disadvantage.

"Whether we like it or not, the perception of Colorado Springs by the rest of the nation and the rest of the world is very negative at this point in time," he said.

Apple's recruiting efforts already have suffered, he said. Apple employees — he declined to say how many — have turned down interviews or offers to move to the Fountain plant because of Amendment 2. Other employers say they fear the same will happen if the controversy continues.

The only tangible economic fallout from Amendment 2 so far has been lost business because of economic boycotts and cancelled conventions. Employers say they are committed to working within the political system to change Amendment 2. But they hint that if Amendment 2 goes on the books, new plants and expansions will go quietly to other cities.

Others aren't so sure, convinced that companies are driven by bottom-line results and that Colorado Springs maintains a good climate for business.

"I don't think there's going to be a significant effect in that area," said Mayor Bob Isaac. "If I were in a business, I think I can bring some pretty bright people from around the country, even though we had an Amendment 2 on the books. All you've got to do is pay them fairly."

Robert Scott, president of the Greater Colorado Springs Economic Development Corp., said it's too early to tell what effect Amendment 2 will have on recruiting efforts. It's had no negative impact yet, he said.

Employers disagree.

They say word of Amendment 2 and the perception that Colorado is intolerant have spread around the world. Articles have appeared in newspapers as far away as Singapore, Ireland and The Netherlands, say employees who travel.

"The least significant issue is whether Ms. (Barbra) Streisand might come to ski or whether you get the next convention of junior insurance agents," Peters said. "What's much more significant, with California going through its economic doldrums now, is that this is the age of Colorado and Oregon. The (advantage) Colorado has is tied up with its ability to be a phenomenally great workplace."

"My Apple friends would be throwing up at this moment over the idea of putting more investment in Colorado Springs unless they were sure this (Amendment 2) too shall pass," Peters said.

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